

5. The method of Claim 4, the state machine
30 comprising a field-programmable gate array.

7. The method of Claim 4, the state machine
5 comprising discrete logic.

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11. A system for activating a card in a network element comprising one or more switch cards, the system comprising:

5 a line card comprising a processor and an associated memory;

10 a common card operable to communicate with a plurality of line cards and operable to determine a type for the line card, to retrieve an executable file for the line card based on the type of the line card, the executable file stored remotely from the line card and the common card, and to download the executable file to the memory on the line card without using boot code on the line card; and

15 the processor operable to operate the line card using the executable file.

12. The system of Claim 11, the memory comprising a volatile memory.

20 13. The system of Claim 11, further comprising a state machine operable to hold the processor while downloading the executable file and to release the processor subsequent to downloading the executable file.

25 14. The system of Claim 13, the state machine comprising a field-programmable gate array.

30 15. The system of Claim 13, the state machine comprising an application-specific integrated circuit.

20. A line card for a network element comprising one or more line cards, the line card comprising:

- a processor;
- a memory associated with the processor;
- 5 an activation system operable to identify the line card to the network element, to hold the processor while the network element downloads an executable file for the line card to the memory without using boot code on the line card, and to release the processor subsequent to the
- 10 downloading of the executable file; and
- the processor operable to operate the line card using the executable file.

21. The line card of Claim 20, the memory comprising
15 a volatile memory.

22. The line card of Claim 20, the activation system comprising a state machine.

20 23. The line card of Claim 22, the state machine comprising a field-programmable gate array.

24. The line card of Claim 22, the state machine comprising an application-specific integrated circuit.

25 25. The line card of Claim 22, the state machine comprising discrete logic.

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